



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND ADOLESCENT POSITIVE WELL-BEING WITH GENDER AS MODERATING FACTOR

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ABSTRACT

The positive development view emphasizes the possibility of adolescents developing positive traits based on their strengths, positive qualities, and supportive environments. Therefore identifying protective factors that could influence the positive well-being of adolescents is important. This study examines the relationship between parental attachment with positive adolescent well-being and the role of gender as a moderator for links between parental attachments with positive adolescent well-being. A total of 400 7th Grade students from government schools in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and state of Selangor were involved in this study. Adolescent positive well-being and parental attachment were measured using the Positive Youth Development Scale (Geldhof, et al., 2013) and Inventory of Peer and Parent Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The results show that both maternal and paternal attachments are predictors of adolescent positive well-being. The study also found that gender moderated the relationship between paternal attachment and adolescent positive well-being. This study provides information on factors that can help the positive development of adolescents. Identifying these factors will provide insight on events or experiences that will increase the occurrence of positive outcomes and reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Adolescents, Positive Well-being, Parental Attachment, Gender.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The positive development approach provides an alternative view in the developmental literature in addressing the issue of risky and problematic behaviour (Lerner et al., 2011). This view emphasizes the possibility of adolescents following positive development based on their strengths and skills, and on conducive environments. Adolescents with positive development not only have less problematic behaviours but also show an increased tendency in making contributions to their positive well-being (Lerner et al., 2011). A positive perspective on adolescent development has been reinforced over the past two decades (Geldhof et al., 2013).

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

A study by Lee (2010) showed that the number of Malaysian adolescents having stress and depression increased from 13% in 1996 to 20.3% in 2006 while Wong and Lua (2011) found the prevalence of mild anxiety and depression at 12.9% and 11.3% in 2011. In addition, data from the Royal Malaysian Police reveal that 1.43% disciplinary-related offenses were recorded in schools in 2010 (Unicef, 2011). The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2016) notes that in 2015 adolescents were involved in 36% of property-related crimes, 29.7% in drugs, and 13.4% in people-related crimes.

These statistics shows the level of social problems involving adolescents in Malaysia which need addressing. It is evident that more adolescents in Malaysia are facing emotional problems and falling into depression, anxiety, and aggression. One of the reasons could be poor parenting that leads to such negative developments. Familial and social relationships have been found to be an important source for positive development of adolescents (Youngblade et al., 2007). It was found that a number of positive familial and social characteristics are related to adolescent adjustment, self-esteem, academic success, social competence, and a decrease in both externalizing and internalizing problems in adolescents. Having a positive development is essential as it would help adolescents lead meaningful and fulfilling lives to enhance what is best in themselves.

Parents are the most influential figures in the adolescent developmental process and evidence shows the family makes up an adolescent's predominant direct environment and that their influence remains important during adolescence (Nokali, Bachman & Votrubá-Drzal, 2011). Studies show that problems related to relationships at home involving parents and siblings can be factors affecting the positive development of adolescents (Lim, Baharuddin & Tan, 2013).

According to research, parental attachment can be a predicting factor for adolescent positive well-being (Guinn, 2015). It was found that strong parental attachment is related to adolescent positive well-being (Williams & Steinberg, 2011). Higher positive well-being was found among adolescents who had perceived their parents as responding positively towards them (Lim, Baharuddin & Tan, 2013).

Boys and girls tend to take different behavioural and cognitive roles in life. It is more common for girls to develop emotional problems such as sadness, anxiety, and anger whereas boys develop externalizing problems such as aggressiveness and dominance (Garaigordobil, Maganto, Perez & Sansinenea, 2009).

3. CURRENT STUDY:

A vast array of research has been conducted on adolescent positive well-being; however there are still a number of research gaps that need to be addressed. Most research conducted on parent adolescent relationships are either on parents as a whole or focus on either parent (Hamzah, Suandi, Hamzah & Tamam, 2014). Mothers and fathers play different roles in raising their children (Gezova, 2015). Hence, identifying the influence of maternal and paternal attachments separately will provide a deeper understanding of parental involvement on adolescent positive well-being.

In the positive youth development framework, gender differences are seen as a factor that could affect adolescent's positive well-being. Gender differences are significant in the studies that have been conducted (Lerner, 2005). Moreover, research has found that gender can be an important moderator of the relationship between familial and social relationships and adolescent positive well-being (Albert, 2003). However, empirical findings to date have been inconsistent and contradictory with regard to the specific role gender plays in adolescent positive well-being (Albert, 2003). Thus, this study examines gender as a moderating factor for the relationship between parental attachment, parental differential treatment, sibling relationships and peer attachment on adolescent positive well-being.

Research is still needed to assess adolescent well-being not only from the standpoint of the absence of problems but also identifying positive indicators of well-being (Pace & Zappulla, 2009). Thus, it is essential to identify the indicators for positive well-being, and in the process this study aims to address the following questions:

1. Do maternal attachment and paternal attachment contribute to adolescent positive well-being?
2. Does gender moderate relationships between maternal attachment and paternal attachment with adolescent positive well-being?

4. METHODOLOGY:

This is a cross-sectional study using the quantitative approach in the correlation research design in determining the relationship between parental attachment and adolescent positive well-being. It involves 400 7th Grade students from government schools in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and the state of Selangor, Malaysia. The data was collected using self administered questionnaires. The measurement tools used for the study were the Positive Youth Development Scale (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) and Inventory of Peer and Parent Attachment (Gullone & Robinson, 2005).

4.1 Adolescent Positive Well-being:

Adolescent positive well-being was measured using the Positive Youth Development Scale. This scale was used as it is easily computable and can provide a single number representing an adolescent's global level of positive development consisting of all the 5Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) (Geldhof et al., 2013). The items for the scale were drawn from multiple sources and scored accordingly using different metrics. Not all items used the 5-point Likert response format. There is a total of 34 items in the Positive Youth Development Short Form Scale. Scoring was done by averaging the individual 5C scores to achieve an overall Positive Youth Development Scale score with a higher score representing better positive well-being. The Cronbach's Alpha value shows 0.734 which indicates strong internal consistency.

4.2 Parental Attachment:

Maternal and paternal attachment was assessed using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA). This inventory was developed to assess adolescents' perceptions of the positive and negative dimension of relationships with their mothers and fathers (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). In this study a revised version of the instrument was used as it helps assess the quality of attachment to mothers and fathers separately instead of parents together. This version comprised 25 items in each mother and father sections. The Cronbach's Alpha value for this scale shows 0.885 and 0.881 respectively for maternal and paternal attachment which indicates strong internal consistency.

5. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS:

The total number of respondents for this study was 400 comprising 216 females and 184 males. The study comprised respondents from the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia which are Malay (176 respondents), Chinese (120), and Indians (104). The majority of parents of the respondents were aged 41 to 50 years. The statistics also show that most respondents had a monthly family income below RM6,000.

6. RESULTS:

6.1 Maternal Attachment and Adolescent Positive well-being:

Firstly, Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to analyse the link between maternal attachment and adolescent positive well-being. Later multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether maternal attachment was a predictor variable for adolescent positive well-being. The results of the Pearson correlations (Table 1) show a significant result ($r = 0.311, p \leq 0.05$) which indicates maternal attachment is associated with adolescent positive well-being. In addition, the findings of multiple regression analysis found that maternal attachment is a predictor of adolescent positive well-being ($\beta = 0.216, p \leq 0.05$) as shown in Table 2.

6.2 Paternal Attachment and Adolescent Positive Well-being:

Similarly, Pearson correlation was conducted to analyse the relationship between paternal attachment and adolescent positive well-being first followed by multiple regression analysis to determine whether paternal attachment is a predictor variable for adolescent positive well-being. The results show that paternal attachment is significantly related and is a predictor of adolescent positive well-being ($r = 0.287, p \leq 0.05; \beta = 0.143, p \leq 0.05$), as seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

6.3 Moderating Role of Gender:

To test the moderating role of gender, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted using "Model 1" in the Macro Process (Table 3). Two variables - maternal attachment and gender - were included in the first step. The findings show that these variables have a significant relationship with adolescent positive well-being ($R^2 = 0.071, F(2, 397) = 15.202, p = 0.001$). These variables were then centered and an interaction term between maternal attachment and gender was created to avoid potentially problematic high multicollinearity with the interaction term (Aiken & West, 1991). Next, to conduct a regression model, an interaction term between maternal attachment and gender was added; however, the results show that the interaction did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in adolescent positive well-being at $\Delta R^2 = 0.000, \Delta F(1, 396) = 0.170, p = 0.680$. This result indicates that there is no potential significant moderation of gender between maternal attachment and adolescent well-being.

The same steps were repeated for paternal attachment and the results for the first step show that the variables (paternal attachment and gender) account for a significant amount of variance in adolescent positive well-being at $R^2 = 0.039, F(2, 397) = 8.011, p < 0.001$ (Table 4). The regression model with the interaction term between paternal attachment and gender also accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in adolescent positive well-being at $\Delta R^2 = 0.025, \Delta F(1, 396) = 10.506, p \leq 0.001, \beta = -0.3282, t(396) = -3.6214, p < 0.001$ which shows that gender moderates the relationship between paternal attachment and adolescent well-being. The interaction plot (Figure 1) shows that female students have higher positive well-being compared to their male counterparts.

7. DISCUSSION:

7.1 Parental Attachment and Adolescent Positive Well-being:

Parental attachment is one of the factors that can influence the social and emotional development of adolescents (William & Steinberg, 2011). It has a major impact on adolescent behaviour, notably problem behaviour (Williams &

Steinberg, 2011). Supportive, effective, and warm parenting are found to be related to greater positive outcomes for adolescents in the area of emotional and social competence, behaviour, and academic achievements (Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria & Knox, 2009). Family togetherness and support are stronger predictors of adolescent positive well-being (Anthony & Stone, 2010) compared to neighbourhood, school, or peer factors. Similarly, this study found maternal attachment ($r = 0.311, p < 0.05$) and paternal attachment ($r = 0.287, p < 0.05$) to have significant relationship with adolescent positive well-being.

Parental support, healthy open communication, and close relationships are especially important during adolescence when many physical, cognitive, and emotional changes are experienced. The Attachment Theory states that the availability and responsiveness of an attachment figure when adolescents feel threatened is fundamental to the development of security and can have a sense of fulfilling connection with others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). The presence or absence of attachment figures is significant relative to an adolescent's perception of how emotionally available and responsive their parents are to their needs especially during the transition from childhood to early adolescence (Bowlby, 1982). Therefore, it can be said that parental emotional responses that contribute to an adolescent's sense of security would influence the positive well-being of adolescents.

Accordingly, this study shows that secure maternal and paternal attachment is significantly related to positive adolescent well-being. Supporting these results, previous studies have shown that adolescents are considered not to engage in risky behaviour such as arguments and fights, smoking (Resnick, Ireland, & Borowsky, 2004), as well as getting addicted to alcohol (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Turrisi, & Johansson, 2005) are those having positive relationships with their parents. Negative outcomes can be seen among adolescents who have difficulty communicating and interacting with their parents (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Turrisi & Johansson, 2005). On the other hand, adolescents who have a strong bond with their parents possess higher levels of positive well-being and are also less likely to experience depressive symptoms (Hair et al., 2005).

It is important for parents to be consistently supportive and caring as adolescents learn that closeness is an effective strategy for emotion regulation and in developing a sense of security and connectedness. Negative social interactions outside the family can be caused by parental inconsistency and unpredictability in responding to adolescent needs. As a result, adolescents would remain passive, especially in social interactions with others, in order to minimize potential psychological pain that they may encounter in these social environments (Chen & Santo, 2015). This shows how important maternal and paternal attachments are for adolescent positive well-being.

7.2 Moderation Role of Gender:

In this study, gender was found to moderate the relationship between paternal attachment and adolescent positive well-being but not for maternal attachment. In other words boys and girls are attached to their mothers equally and there is no gender difference in maternal attachment with adolescent positive well-being. This may be due to adolescents' desire for independence and autonomy at this stage of their lives.

Greater autonomy would reduce the relationship with parents (Koepke & Denissen, 2012; McElhaney & Allen, 2012). During adolescence, the desire for autonomy normally intensifies due to biological, physical, and emotional changes, as well as changes in social experiences, and the receiving of special rights and responsibilities. Feelings of independence and the ability of adolescents to make their own decisions increases irrespective of their gender. This could be the reason for gender not being a moderating factor in the relationship between maternal attachment and adolescent positive well-being.

On the other hand, the results of this study show that gender moderates the relationship between paternal attachment and adolescent positive well-being. Paternal participation in the life of adolescents can be a protective factor for their positive development and would have an impact later on in their successful transition into adulthood (Quach, Epstein, Riley, Falconer & Fang, 2013). A father's increased involvement can be the protective factor in shielding children against risks such as criminal activity or offenses and educational failure as well as to heighten their resilient development (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008). Similarly, in this study, paternal attachment is shown to have a significant influence on adolescent positive well-being and gender to be a moderating influence on the relationship.

Better behavioural and psychological adjustment, secure peer relationships, and enhanced social skills can be predicted by a positive father's involvement which encompasses characteristics such as acceptance and emotional warmth (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Zhang, Zhao, Ju & Ma, 2015). A supportive father provides emotional warmth and understanding which results in not only reducing the chances of increased levels of problems (Gervan, Granic, Solomon, Blokland, & Ferguson, 2012) but also serve as a buffer against the negative effects of potential risk exposure, providing protection against behavioural problems (Menning, 2006) and strengthening the adaptive responses of adolescents (Rinaldi & Howe, 2012).

This study shows that girls had better positive well-being compared to boys. Similar findings were found in earlier research where paternal attachment was found to be positively associated with the social functioning and psychosocial adjustment of daughters (Brumariu & Kerns, 2010; Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010). During adolescence, issues of 'similarity versus differentiation' are contested by youngsters to establish independence and individuality (Pickhardt, 2010). Girls tend to have more arguments and conflicts with mothers who have more similarities with them. This can perhaps explain the reason that girls having a stronger attachment to their fathers display higher positive well-being.

8. CONCLUSION:

This study shows that maternal as well as paternal attachments are significant predictors of adolescent positive well-being. The findings support the view of the theories used as the baseline for the study which are the Positive Youth Development Framework, Family System Theory, and Attachment Theory. The study contributes to understanding the interrelationships between family and social environment during early adolescence. It connects Family System Theory and Attachment Theory with the Positive Youth Development Framework, particularly in balancing the theoretical work that emphasizes that adolescent positive well-being is about the interactions between families (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

In the Positive Youth Development Framework, gender differences are seen as a factor that could affect adolescent positive well-being. These differences are significant in previous studies conducted (Lerner, 2005) and gender is seen as a moderator for adolescent positive well-being (Albert, 2003). Girls report higher positive youth development and lower risk behaviours. Similarly, this study found that gender moderates the relationship between paternal attachment and adolescent positive well-being. It also notes that girls generally did have higher positive well-being compared to boys.

The information from this study adds to the existing literature on parental attachment during early adolescence. More specifically, it addresses mothers and fathers separately. Much of previous research focused on examining attachments of both or either parent (Hamzah, Suandi, Hamzah & Tamam, 2014; Roehlkepartain, 2013). The findings of this study provide information on both mother and father attachments and the results show that these relationships are significant predictors of the positive development of adolescents.

However, there are several limitations in this study. Firstly, it is limited in terms of population and ecological validity. Due to the demographic characteristics of the current sample, it is likely that implications may only apply to adolescents in the cultural majority, raised in two-parent homes, and living within a middle-to-high social economic status community. Further, the study sample is limited to adolescents aged 13 in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Greater insight and relevance could be achieved if future studies employed a wider sampling range.

In addition, this study included measures of several individual characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, years of education, and monthly income) but not individual-level measures such attitudes, behaviours, and personalities of adolescents and parents. To operationalize fully the interactions of adolescents and families future research can incorporate the individual characteristics of participating adolescents and their parents to arrive at a richer understanding of factors influencing adolescent positive well-being.

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Table 1. Correlation between Maternal and Paternal Attachment with Adolescent Positive Well-being

Variable	1	2	3
1. Positive well-being	1		
2. Maternal Attachment	.311**	1	
3. Paternal Attachment	.287**	.665**	1

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis between Maternal and Paternal Attachment with Adolescent Positive Well-being

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
	B	Std Error				
(Constant)	83.797	3.618			23.163	.000
Maternal Attachment	0.158	0.046		0.216	3.407	.001
Paternal Attachment	0.115	0.051		0.143	2.260	.024

Note: $F(2,397) = 76.397, p \leq 0.05$

Table 3. Interaction between Gender, Maternal Attachment and Adolescent Positive Well-being

Model	R	R ²	Adj R ²	SEE	Change Statistics				
					R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	.197 ^a	.039	.034	12.454	.039	8.011	2	397	.000
2	.252 ^b	.064	.057	12.308	.025	10.51	1	396	.001

Note: $b = -0.3282, t(396) = -3.6214, p < 0.001$

a. Predictors: (Constant), Paternal Attachment, Gender

b. Predictors: (Constant), Paternal Attachment, Gender, Gender Paternal Attachment

Table 4. Interaction between Gender, Paternal Attachment and Adolescent Positive Well-being

Model	R	R ²	Adj R ²	SEE	Change Statistics				
					R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	.267 ^a	.071	.066	12.243	.071	15.20	2	397	.000
2	.267 ^b	.072	.065	12.256	.000	.170	1	396	.680

a. Predictors: (Constant), Maternal Attachment, Gender

b. Predictors: (Constant), Maternal Attachment, Gender, Gender Maternal Attachment

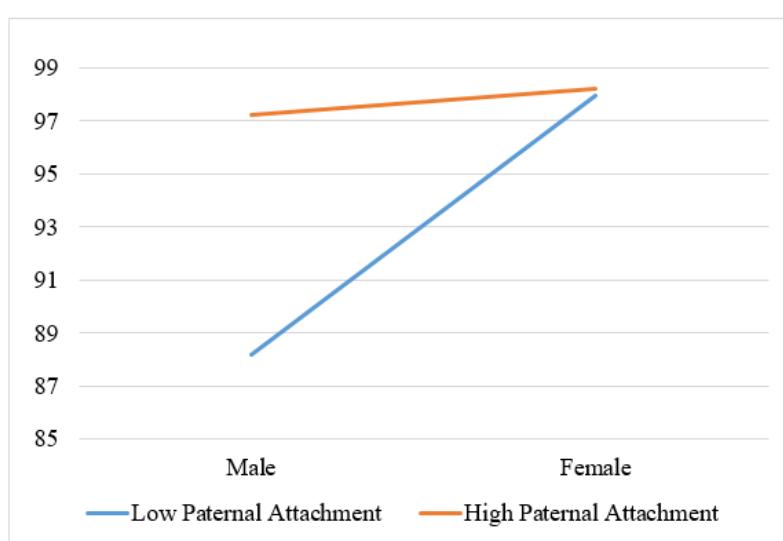


Figure 1. Interaction Plot for the Moderation Role of Gender on the Relationship between Paternal Attachment and Adolescent Positive Well-being